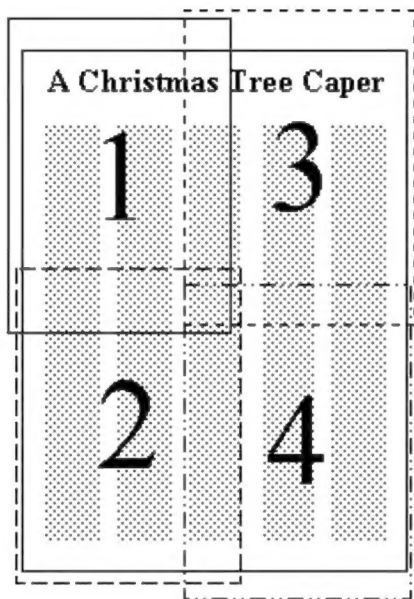


NOTE: This newspaper appearance was divided and enlarged to fill 8 ½" x 11" pages, roughly in the manner shown below.



SPACE BOU

By JACK RITCHIE

(Copy)

A SHORT SHORT STORY

"I READ a pretty good science-fiction story the other day," I said. "It was called, 'The War of the Worlds,' or 'Venus Was Neutral Because She Had No Arms.'"

My wife, Elaine, smiled sweetly. "Just sit still and listen, Dear. That's a good boy."

Miss Andrews moved away from the fireplace and came to the davenport. "Do you mind if I sit next to you, Mr. Edwards?"

"Not at all," I said. "Might be a tight squeeze though." I moved over and she sat down between my wife and me.

Mr. Ponsonby adjusted his glasses and surveyed the dozen persons seated in our living room.

"I believe we're all here now. I might as well call the meeting to order."

He rapped the edge of a metal ash tray with his pencil. "The 68th meeting of the Granger Falls Science Fiction Club will now come to order."

"Mr. Chairman," I said. "I move that the meeting be changed from Monday to Tuesday nights."

Mr. Ponsonby frowned slightly. "You are out of order, Sir."

The smile was still on my wife's lips, but it was strained. "You aren't a member of the club yet, Dear. And besides, it's not quite cricket to expect us to change our meeting night just so that you can go bowling Mon-

derstand I'll speak right up."

Miss Andrews touched my arm. "Your wife just kicked me on the shins. I think that was meant for you."

"Thank you," I said. "Message received."

MRS. Wilkins stared at me for another moment and then resumed her talk. She was on the subject of space travel when I happened to



Miss Andrews joined me.

"How does it happen that you've never been to a meeting before?" she asked.

"Monday is my bowling night."

"Ah," she said, watching me. "The season is over?"

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The smile was still on my wife's lips, but it was strained. "You aren't a member of the club yet, Dear. And besides, it's not quite cricket to expect us to change our meeting night just so that you can go bowling Mondays."

THE regular business was dispensed with and Mr. Ponsonby again rapped for attention.

"We indeed are privileged this evening to have Mrs. Willkins with us. She is going to speak on modern science-fiction trends. She came here all the way from Jupiter." He chuckled. "Jupiter, Ohio, of course."

I closed my eyes. When I opened them again Mrs. Willkins was on her feet. She was a tall, angular woman with a humorless smile on her face.

She cleared her throat.

"Science fiction is no longer in its infancy. New scopes, new dimensions, so to speak, have been added to the art."

She paused and her eyes swept over us. "The day of the Bems is past."

"What's Bems?" I asked.

The club members stared at me unbelievably.

"An abbreviation for Bug-Eyed Monsters," Mrs. Willkins said acidly. "Do you mind if I continue?"

"Certainly," I said. "I mean, please do go on. If there's anything I don't un-

derstand I'll speak right up."

Miss Andrews touched my arm. "Your wife just kicked me on the shins. I think that was meant for you."

"Thank you," I said. "Message received."

MRS. Willkins stared at me for another moment and then resumed her talk. She was on the subject of space travel when I happened to yawn.

She stopped and her smile was thinner than ever. "Perhaps Mr. Edwards isn't interested in space travel?"

"Oh, sure," I said. "But on the other hand, hasn't it ever struck you that it's the hard way to explore the universe? Shoving the old battered carcass about from one planet to the other, you know. Wouldn't it be simpler to sit in a nice comfortable chair and analyze cosmic rays or some such thing?"

The club members regarded me again and I had the distinct impression that I might be a Bem.

I turned to Miss Andrews. "I'm more interested in the larger aspects of these things. Just the other day I read a moving short story. 'Planet Crashes Into Moon,' or 'Mars in de Cold, Cold Ground.'"

"How charming," Miss Andrews said, returning my smile. "I can see that you and I will have a lot of fun."

"DEAR," my wife said quietly, but with astonishing penetration. "Why don't you go into the kitchen and see if the sandwiches are burning, or something?"

I went into the kitchen and was eating a sandwich when

Miss Andrews joined me.

"How does it happen that you've never been to a meeting before?" she asked.

"Monday is my bowling night."

"Ah," she said, watching me. "The season is over?"

"Not exactly. I've got a substitute."

She sat down at the table. "Just for tonight?"

I studied my sandwich. "Too much mustard."

I caught the sound of footsteps approaching the kitchen and leaned over the table a bit.

"My wife's been trying to get me to join the club for the past year. I've decided that she's right."

THE door swung open and my wife entered.

"Just think," I said to Miss Andrews. "All this time I've been out with the boys on Monday night. I didn't realize what I was missing."

I glanced at my wife and moved away from Miss Andrews slightly. "Bowling's just a game. This is real intellectual stuff."

"I think it's simply delightful that Mr. Edwards is joining the club," Miss Andrews said to Elaine. "We have so few men."

My wife smiled, but it hurt. "I know just what you mean, Dear. Exactly."

Miss Andrews rose and smiled. "I believe I'll join the others."

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'Spaceman Marooned,' or 'He Thought He Knew Where He Was, But He Couldn't Tell for Saturn.'"

I thought it was rather limp, but nevertheless I nodded approvingly.

My wife waited until she

I took a paper out of my coat pocket. "It's a very short story," I said. "But it'll leave you thinking."

I LISTENED patiently to the conversation for 15 minutes and then glanced up at the old clock. It was 20 minutes before 9 o'clock.

"How about my joining the club officially?" I said. "Who's got the application blanks?"

Mr. Ponsonby sighed. "We do not have application blanks. To become a member, you must read one of your works and have it passed on by the members."

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My wife waited until the door closed after Miss Andrews. "If there's one thing I can't stand it's a woman with a sense of humor. It's unnatural."

The phone rang and I picked up the kitchen extension. When I hung up, my wife was waiting.

"That was Pete," I said. "He was supposed to substitute for me tonight, but he can't make it." My eyes went automatically to the clock.

"You are not going bowling tonight," Elaine said firmly.

"Of course not, Dear. It was the furthest thought from my mind. I'm enjoying every minute of this."

My wife examined me suspiciously and then we went back into the living room. She took the seat between Miss Andrews and me.

"What's the topic now?" I asked.

Mrs. Willkins looked at me warily. "We were discussing the works of Bradbury. He's a writer, you know."

"Well, I'll be darned," I said enthusiastically. "Only 12 years old and yet the boy writes. Frankly, I always had the idea that he was a little stupid."

There was sharpness in my wife's voice. "That's Ray Bradbury. Not Jimmy Bradbury, our paper boy."

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I got to my feet. "I got me here a story which I wrote."

I thought that over and decided that perhaps I'd gone too far. I rephrased the statement.

"I have written a story," I said simply.

I took a paper out of my coat pocket. "It's a short story," I said. "But it'll leave you thinking."

I UNFOLDED my paper and began reading. "When it was all over, there were only two persons left on the earth."

Mrs. Willkins sniffed. "That is one of the oldest and most overdone situations in science fiction."

"Please allow me to continue, Mrs. Willkins," I said sternly.

I started again. "When it was all over, there were only two persons left in the world."

I looked around the room. "And after 20 years, the older man died."

There was silence as I folded my paper and returned it to my pocket.

I studied their faces.

They were thinking.

I was a little late getting to the bowling alley, but my team took three games out of three.

I never bowled better.